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ABSTRACT

In 1986, a study of remedial programs in Texas community colleges was conducted to determine the range of current practices and to assess the outcomes achieved. Each campus was sent a detailed self-study guide focusing on policies and practices related to assessment and placement, descriptive and evaluative information, policies related to course credit, and program strengths and weaknesses. Study findings included the following: (1) all but three colleges assessed new students' skills in reading, writing, and mathematics; (2) the colleges used a variety of commercially available testing instruments; (3) approximately 30 colleges reported assessing less than half of their new students; (4) of those new students assessed in reading and writing, about 40% were identified as needing remediation; (5) more than half of the students diagnosed as needing remediation in reading, writing, or math, actually enrolled in a remediation course; (6) in 32 colleges, remedial reading and writing were administered through the same organizational unit, while remedial mathematics was administered separately; (7) the most common configuration of remedial offerings was two courses in each of the remedial areas; and (8) only three institutions awarded degree credit for remedial reading or mathematics, while seven colleges allowed such credit for remedial writing. Recommendations developed by the colleges' self-study task forces and the self-study guide are included. (UCM)

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Texas Association of Junior and Community College
Instructional Administrators

REMEDIAL EDUCATION STUDY

Report prepared by:

Elizabeth Fisk Skinner
Stephen Carter

National Center for Postsecondary
Governance and Finance, Research
Center at Arizona State University

April 1987

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Texas Association of Junior and Community College
Instructional Administrators

REMEDIAL EDUCATION STUDY

INTRODUCTION

The Texas Association of Junior and Community College Instructional Administrators in conjunction with the Texas Public Community/Junior College Association and the Academy of Educational Development, has conducted a statewide study of remedial education programs in community colleges, junior colleges, and technical institutes. The purpose of the study was to produce baseline data on the range of current practices related to remedial education and to assess the outcomes achieved.

Every two-year postsecondary institution in Texas participated in the study which has yielded a rich source of descriptive information about remedial education in the state. The completion of this study provides valuable input for colleges as they reexamine the ways in which they serve students who come to them unprepared for college work.

The issues surrounding remedial education represent one of the most serious challenges facing postsecondary institutions nationwide. Policies developed to govern remedial education are intertwined with a college's dual responsibility to provide access to higher education and to preserve the quality of the educational experience afforded to students. It is no exaggeration to say that a college's ability to address the issues of remedial education will be critical to its continued viability.

Remedial Education

The term remedial education refers to courses designed to bring underprepared students to the level of competency in reading, writing, mathematics or other basic skills necessary for success in the degree programs offered by a college. The terms compensatory education and developmental studies have also been used to refer to this type of course offering. While some educators have attempted to draw distinctions among these terms, they are in practice used interchangeably to describe similar programs.

Remedial programs are found on most postsecondary campuses across the country, though the specific nature of these programs may vary. Included are programs designed to give marginally prepared students the skills practice they need to achieve in the college courses they are simultaneously taking. At the other end of the spectrum are comprehensive "block" programs for students with skills far below college level. These students sometimes take a full load of courses at a remedial level for several semesters. As colleges expand the number of courses offered at a pre-college level, they are struggling to develop policies to govern this aspect of their curriculum and to define its relationships to the overall mission of postsecondary institutions.

The major issues surrounding remedial education concern the effectiveness and relevance of the programs, the college's ability to identify and place students needing remediation, and its ability to track these students for the purposes of advisement and program evaluation. These issues provide the focus for the study of remedial education in Texas two-year postsecondary institutions reported here.

The Study

The study, which was coordinated by Brazosport College under the direction of John Grable, was conducted according to the general principles that apply to self-studies for reaccreditation by the Southern Association. Each campus was sent a detailed guide for the self-study in August of 1986. As the self-study reports were completed they were reviewed and summarized by the National Center for Postsecondary Governance and Finance Research Center at Arizona State University.

On each campus, responsibility for the self-study was given to a specially appointed task force comprised of administrators and faculty not having primary involvement with remedial education. This task force was asked to evaluate the remedial education programs on the campus based on information requested from the faculty most involved. The intent was to have those with the greatest knowledge provide factual information, while those in a position to be more objective made judgments about strengths and weaknesses of the programs in relation to institutional goals.

In responding to the self-study guide, the colleges were asked to emphasize accurate and concise descriptions of programs and reporting of verifiable outcomes. Sixty-two reports were received representing responses from all the Texas two-year postsecondary institutions. A copy of the self-study guide and a list of the participating campuses are included in Appendices A and B.

The sections which follow summarize the descriptive information provided by the self-study reports in four areas: (1) policies and practices related to assessment and placement; (2) descriptions of the remedial programs; (3) policies relating to remedial education course credit; and (4) program evaluation. A fifth section (5) discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the programs as evaluated by the institutional task forces on each campus. A summary of their recommendations for improving remedial education is also presented.

ASSESSMENT AND PLACEMENT

Colleges were asked to identify the procedures and instruments they use for assessment in the remedial areas. All but three colleges do assess new students in reading, writing, and mathematics. Typically, colleges report reviewing ACT and SAT scores at the time of registration and administering standardized tests in the specific skill areas to those students who have no ACT/SAT scores or who submit scores which fall below established criteria. In many cases this placement testing is followed up with diagnostic testing after enrollment in remedial classes. This in-class testing sometimes results in transfer to other levels of remedial work or to college-level skills classes.

Not all colleges follow this typical pattern in assessing basic skills. Some give standardized skills tests to all entering students, while others provide no testing, relying exclusively on examination of ACT or SAT scores and a review of previous coursework. Some use only locally designed tests, and some do no testing until students have enrolled in remedial courses.

Assessment Instruments and Procedures

A variety of commercially available testing instruments are utilized by the Texas community and junior colleges to assess the basic skills of entering students. The tests identified in the self-study reports are listed in Table 1

Table 1. Published tests used for assessment listed with the number of Texas two-year colleges using each test for reading, writing, or mathematics.

	Reading	Writing	Math
Comprehensive Tests			
Assessment & Placement Services for Community Colleges (ETS)	3	2	0
ASSET (Assessment of Skills for Successful Entry and Transfer)(ACT)	13	13	13
DTLS or DTMS (Descriptive Tests of Language and Math Skills) (ETS)	7	9	14
DAT (Differential Aptitude Tests) (The Psychological Corporation)	4	2	4
Unspecified ETS test	4	2	1
Reading Tests			
Nelson Denny (Riverside)	24	6	0
Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (Psychological Corporation)	4	0	0
Writing Tests			
Stanford Language Achievement Test (Psychological Corporation)	0	2	0
TSWE (Test of Standard Written English) (ETS)	0	3	0
WEEP (Written English Expression Placement Test) (ETS)	0	3	0
Writing Proficiency Program (Bossone)	0	1	0
Math Test			
MAA (Math Association of America)	0	0	5

A number of colleges have adopted published tests which cover all three areas of remedial skill. Thirteen colleges use the ASSET test (Assessment of Skills for Successful Entry and Transfer) published by the American College Testing Program. This test is part of a new comprehensive approach to advising and placement developed specifically for community colleges. The Assessment and Placement Services for Community Colleges test and the Descriptive Tests of Language and Math Skills, both published by the Educational Testing Service, are also comprehensive testing instruments used by a number of colleges. The Differential Aptitude Test, an aptitude test designed by the Psychological Corporation for use in career advisement, is utilized by the four technical institutes in the state.

The most commonly used test specifically designed to test reading is the Nelson Denny, used by 24 colleges. It is one of the few reading tests designed for a college population that is also easily administered and scored. Four schools use the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test, and three report developing their own assessment tool in reading. Only two rely totally on ACT/SAT scores.

In writing, most colleges that have chosen a commercially available objective test for assessment, use one of the comprehensive batteries. Three report using the TSWE (Test of Standard Written English), which is actually an optional part of the SAT test; three use the WEEP (Written English Expression Placement test) from ETS; and one uses the test provided by Bossone's Writing Proficiency Program. Nine colleges have devised their own objective test, six use scores from the Nelson Denny reading test to place students in remedial English, and five rely only on ACT/SAT scores. Five colleges report the use of testing instruments specifically designed for students for whom English is a second language, but only two specify the name of the test, identifying the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency.

In addition to this objective testing, 25 institutions involve the use of a writing sample in the assessment. For half of these schools, however, the writing sample is collected from students after they enroll in an English class and is used for diagnostic purposes as well as evidence for possible transfer to higher or lower level writing classes. The writing samples are usually scored holistically according to a specified set of criteria by two or more raters to ensure objectivity.

In the math area, 32 colleges utilize one of the comprehensive test batteries, and five use the test provided by the Math Association of America. In contrast, 17 institutions rely only on a locally devised test, and eight only review ACT/SAT scores

and high school transcripts. Many colleges seem to be willing to use their own judgment in developing testing instruments and analyzing past experience for placement decisions in mathematics. In addition, however, colleges tend to be more comprehensive in the assessment of math skills with many colleges using multiple criteria to determine placement. For example, a number of colleges use ACT/SAT scores, high school transcripts, and campus-based testing together with information from advisement sessions during which the students' background and educational goals are discussed.

The colleges were asked how they established the procedure and criteria they utilize in assessment. Twenty-seven do not report any specific procedure used in determining criteria and only fifteen colleges report having conducted a systematic study to determine cut-off scores. When reported, these studies usually involve a correlation of student scores on the assessment instrument with their subsequent performance in selected courses.

Other methods of determining criteria are reported by a few institutions, such as reviewing the practices of other institutions or accepting the suggestions of the test publishers. Several colleges examine the readability of textbooks used in introductory course work to set the grade-level criteria for reading, and several look at the exit competencies established for the remedial programs to determine the placement criteria. One college had conducted a faculty survey about skills required in introductory courses and another had investigated the common errors made by students in freshman English to determine the placement criteria in English.

Most colleges report that they are somewhat satisfied with their current assessment criteria but that they are looking for more valid procedures that would better meet their needs. Some have instituted new procedures so recently that they can not yet judge their effectiveness.

Proportion of Entering Students Assessed

A significant proportion of the students entering Texas community colleges are not being assessed in reading, writing, or mathematics. Of those assessed and recommended for remediation, a significant number are not being enrolled in appropriate educational programs. As shown in Table 2, the average percent of new students assessed is less than 50 percent in each of the three areas of remediation. Approximately 30 colleges reported assessing less than half of their new students.

Table 2. The percentages of students assessed in reading, writing, and mathematics.

	Reading	Writing	Math
average % of new students assessed	43%	40%	45%
range of %	5-100%	7-100%	8-100%
number of colleges assessing 100%	2	1	2
number of colleges assessing $\geq$ 75%	7	6	8
number of colleges assessing $\leq$ 25%	14	17	17
number of colleges reporting they have no assessment program	1	2	0
number of colleges not reporting usable data	18	16	15

While all but three colleges do assess new students in reading, writing, and mathematics, there is considerable variation in the percentages reported across colleges, with figures ranging from less than 10 percent to 100 percent in each of the three areas. Relatively few (six to eight) colleges assess more than 75 percent of their new students in any of the three areas and over one- third of those colleges reporting information on assessment (14-17 colleges) assess 25 percent or less. A number of institutions do not report usable data on assessment, often commenting that they do not keep the assessment records of new students separate from the records of continuing students.

Those colleges assessing less than 100 percent of their newly enrolled students presented a variety of explanations. Many colleges accept ACT or SAT scores in lieu of on-campus testing as a basis for placement and do not include those submitting ACT/SAT scores in the number of new students assessed. Most institutions exclude students who already have degrees, and many institutions exclude transfer students with a stated minimum number of transfer credit hours (varying from 3 to 30). Others exclude individuals with transfer hours in the specific skill areas being tested.

Part-time students are often excluded from testing as are students who enroll in special interest courses with no expressed interest in a degree program. A number of colleges exclude students enrolled in certificate or degree programs which do not require the skill area (usually math) being tested. This criteria for exclusion, however, raises questions about the nature of community college programs that do not require college levels of reading, writing, or math skill.

At some institutions students may not be tested if they are night school students, enroll at extension campuses, register late, or do not go through an orientation program. Finally, some colleges only assess students in a skill area when they register for a course in that area. In a few schools the assessment occurs in class after enrollment and is only used as a basis for transferring students to other courses in the skill area.

Several institutions reported the overall number of new and continuing students assessed to show that their assessment programs are more extensive than figures for new students alone would indicate. Future studies should investigate this aspect of campus-based testing programs to ensure that an accurate picture of current assessment practices is used as a basis for developing future policy.

Proportion of Assessed Students Diagnosed As Needing Remediation

Of those new students assessed in reading and writing across the colleges, an average of about 40 percent perform at a level that identifies them as needing remediation. In mathematics, an average of over 50 percent are diagnosed. Thirty-seven colleges identify at least half of their new assessed students as remedial in mathematics (in comparison to 28 in reading and 26 in writing). Nineteen colleges diagnose as remedial 75 percent or more of their new students assessed in mathematics, while only five colleges diagnose that percentage of new students in reading or writing. Perhaps the higher proportion of students found to be remedial in mathematics reflects a general tendency for students to be less adequately prepared in this skill area, but it may also be due to the more comprehensive nature of mathematics assessment on many campuses.

Table 3. Percentage of new assessed students diagnosed as needing remediation.

	Reading	Writing	Math
average % of assessed new students diagnosed for remediation	40%	43%	54%
range of percentages	14%-100%	15%-100%	8%-100%
number of colleges diagnosing $\geq$ 75%	5	5	19
number of colleges diagnosing $\leq$ 25%	8	11	7
number of colleges not reporting usable data	9	9	9

Variation across schools in the percentage of new students diagnosed in each skill area may be the result of a number of factors including differences in the background characteristics of the students entering the institution. In addition, however, the variation may be due to differences in the instruments used for assessment and the cut-off points designated as indicators of the need for remediation, as well as differences in definitions of what constitutes remedial course work. For example, some colleges include those placing into intermediate algebra as remedial students, while others do not consider this a remedial placement. Some schools consider any student reading below a thirteenth grade level to be remedial, while others place the cut-off score at a tenth grade level.

Proportion of Diagnosed Students Enrolled in Remedial Courses

An average of about half of the new students diagnosed as needing remedial reading actually enroll in a remedial course, while an average of about 60 percent of those needing remedial writing or mathematics enrolled.

Table 4. Percentage of new diagnosed students enrolling in remedial courses.

	Reading	Writing	Math
average % of new diagnosed students enrolled in remedial courses	52%	64%	63%
range of %	5-100%	20-100%	8-100%
number of colleges enrolling 100%	1	7	5
number of colleges enrolling $\geq$ 75%	9	21	17
number of colleges enrolling $\leq$ 25%	11	2	5
number of colleges not reporting usable data	9	13	17

Nine schools report enrolling all of the new diagnosed students in one or more skill areas. However, five of these colleges assess students after they are already enrolled in skills classes. Of the four other schools one has a restricted testing program only affecting students enrolling in one of four specific degree programs, and one has a waiver system strictly enforced. The two other schools provide little information to indicate why they are able to achieve 100 percent enrollment.

Colleges that enroll less than 100 percent of the students diagnosed as needing remediation report a variety of explanations. Most state that enrollment is voluntary, many adding that such a policy is consistent with the open-access philosophy of their institution. Fourteen colleges, however, report that enrollment is required although waivers are possible. There appears to be considerable variation in the way waiver systems are administered since the proportions of diagnosed students enrolled vary greatly (from 26 to 100 percent) for those schools with waiver systems.

According to reports from colleges with voluntary enrollment, there are a number of reasons why students may choose not to enroll. Some students may postpone enrollment in remedial courses because of schedule conflicts. In some cases there are not enough class sections to accommodate all those diagnosed as needing remediation. Even when there is adequate class space and convenient scheduling, students may not enroll in remedial courses because they will not earn transfer credit or will be delayed in completing the course requirements of degree programs. This reasoning is ascribed especially to students in technical programs with heavy course requirements. Finally, some institutions report simply that students do not follow counselors' advice or that the advisors themselves do not emphasize the need for appropriate remediation.

THE REMEDIAL PROGRAMS

All but two colleges have remedial courses in reading, writing, and mathematics. The remedial programs, however, vary from campus to campus in terms of organization, course offerings, and availability support services.

Organizational Patterns

In 32 colleges remedial reading and writing programs are administered through the same organizational unit, usually a communications division; while remedial mathematics is administered separately, usually through a division of math and science. Seventeen colleges have a separate administrative unit, often designated as the department of developmental studies, which includes all three areas of remediation.

Other patterns of organization are occasionally reported. For example, in four colleges each remedial area is in a separate unit, but there is a coordinating committee which looks across programs at the entire remedial effort of the college. In two colleges reading is not part of an established department but is a separate program directly under a dean. Two other colleges have divisions of communication and math which administered all reading, writing, and mathematics courses at both the remedial and the transfer levels.

On a few campuses more than one organizational unit offered remedial courses in the same area. For example, at one college remedial math courses are offered by a developmental studies division, a technical math program and the math department. In another, remedial reading courses are offered by both the developmental studies program and the communications division.

Remedial Course Offerings

Table 5 summarizes information about the number of courses offered in each of the three remedial areas. For comparative purposes, intermediate algebra courses have been counted as remedial courses even if the individual college does not so designate them. In addition, all reading courses reported have been counted as remedial since there is so much variation across colleges in whether a given type of reading course is considered remedial. However, since some colleges may not have reported a course if they do not designate it as remedial, Table 5 may underestimate the numbers of reading, writing, and math courses found on individual campuses.

Table 5. Number of colleges offering one, two, three, or more courses in each area of remedial skill.

Number of courses	Reading	Writing	Math
0	1	1	0
1	11	24	8
2	19	31	24
3	17	6	23
4	11	0	5
5 -10	2	0	2
10+	1	0	0

The most common configuration of offerings consists of two courses in each of the remedial areas. Twenty-four colleges, however, offer only one course in writing; and only six offer more than two, compared with 31 colleges offering more than two courses in reading and 30 offering more than two in mathematics.

In both reading and writing, differences in numbers of course offerings may not be particularly significant because of the similarity in syllabi across courses and the colleges' policies allowing reenrollment in remedial courses. For example, the 24 campuses offering only one course in writing usually allow

students to repeat this course as many times as necessary. The 37 other schools offering two or three courses describe syllabi for these courses which are almost identical in terms of course objectives and instructional methods. Regardless of the number of courses listed in their catalogs, the colleges seem to be offering the students the opportunity to develop reading and writing skills at their own pace, taking as many semesters as necessary.

In addition to the courses listed in Table 5, six colleges report courses at the remedial level in reading and writing, which are specifically designed for students with English as a second language. The number of such ESL courses offered varies from one to seven.

In mathematics there seems to be clearer differentiation of remedial courses in terms of objectives and content. Most campuses offer one or more arithmetic courses and an elementary algebra course as remedial offerings. When there is only one course offered, it usually covers both of these areas of math skill. As mentioned previously, most campuses offer intermediate algebra but differ as to whether they consider it to be a remedial or college-level course. Many campuses also offer basic math courses designed for specific program areas on campus such as business or technology.

Support Services

Most colleges list a variety of support services which are available to students in remedial courses. Typically a campus has a learning assistance center providing tutoring, self-paced materials, audiovisual materials and some computer assisted instruction. The learning assistance center often provides study skills workshops, while study skills courses are sometimes offered by a reading department or a developmental studies program. In addition, there may be separate reading, writing, or math labs providing tutoring and self-instructional materials in the specific skill areas. Reports emphasize the availability during office hours of instructors who teach the remedial courses, especially in mathematics. Counseling services are generally provided to all students, while special services may also be available to those qualifying for campus programs for disadvantaged students. Remedial students, then, on most campuses may take advantage of a number of educational services to supplement their course work.

POLICIES AFFECTING REMEDIAL COURSE CREDIT

Only three institutions award degree credit for remedial reading or mathematics courses, while seven allow such credit for remedial writing courses. Several colleges specify that remedial mathematics could be used for liberal arts math credit or that remedial English could be used for credit in some certificate or technical degree programs. Several of the colleges with such provisions add that they are currently in the process of changing policies so that the degree credit would no longer be allowed. The opinions of the task forces regarding this area of policy are mixed. Some identify the lack of degree credit awarded to remedial courses as a factor contributing to low student motivation and low enrollment rates.

Most colleges do not limit the number of times a student may reenroll in a remedial course. Only six have a limit in mathematics, seven in reading, and nine in writing. When there is a limit, it is most commonly three repetitions. Students are generally given incomplete grades until they are able to finish the course requirements. Opinions are mixed about the appropriateness of this nonpunitive grading policy.

Nineteen colleges have a math competency requirement, usually consisting of six credit hours of college-level mathematics, that must be met by all students before graduation. Some of the colleges without such a general graduation requirement have no policy regarding math competency at all, while others specify the programs which are excluded. A wide variety of exempt programs are identified -- forty-two in all -- ranging from English to electronics. Some colleges exclude all certificates or AAS degrees, while others exclude all AA degrees. There is little consistency in policy across the colleges.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Most colleges rely primarily on successful completion of the remedial courses as the only indication that a student has been remediated except in the area of reading where 35 colleges specify the use of an objective test to determine reading level. Usually a tenth grade reading level is specified as the minimum indication of readiness for college-level work.

Twenty-seven colleges report that they have no outcome data on students enrolling in remedial programs. Some go on to explain that their programs are too new or that they are now in the process of developing the technical capacity to collect such information. Twenty-one colleges report information dealing only with the students' performance in the remedial program itself. This information includes course completion rates, course grades, pre-post gains on standardized tests, and student evaluations. Most of the data reported document student progress within the program.

Fifteen colleges report follow-up data on student performance after completing the remedial program. Usually this data is contrasted with data for the student population as a whole or, in some cases, with data for students who are diagnosed as needing remediation but do not enroll in remedial courses. The follow-up information sometimes includes overall retention data, course completion rates, and GPA. Nine schools report grades for specific courses usually in math, English, and history. Most of the follow-up studies show positive results except for students beginning in the lowest skill levels in mathematics. Few schools can demonstrate that these students have been able to successfully complete college-level courses.

However, the follow-up studies are invariably short-term investigations covering one or two semesters. Only one college reports degree completion data for remedial students. In addition, most of the data represent the findings of a single study often conducted several years before the time of the self-study. No college indicates that it has established an ongoing student tracking program.

TASK FORCE EVALUATIONS OF REMEDIAL EDUCATION

The task forces at each college were asked to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the remedial programs on their campuses and to make recommendations for improvement in each area. After discussing the ways in which remedial education relates to their institution goals, the task forces were free to comment on any aspects of the programs they felt to be important. The comments and recommendations made by these committees concern (a) assessment and placement; (b) the characteristics of the instructional programs; (c) program evaluation; and (d) the relationship of remedial programs with each other and with the rest of the college.

Assessment and Placement

Comments regarding assessment and placement are mixed. Positive statements are made about the fact that assessment and placement procedures are in place, that they are manageable, and that criteria are clear and publicly stated. The mere existence of a formalized placement process is positive, especially for those institutions that have recently established or extensively revised their procedures.

When weaknesses are discussed, however, they concern the relevance of criteria used for assessment and the effectiveness of placement policies. A number of colleges question whether the assessment instruments currently use tap skills actually needed by students in their community college course work. The Nelson-Denny reading test, for example, used by 24 institutions, is widely criticized because it does not sample the types of reading tasks students confront in college course work, especially in science and technology. In addition, it does not allow students to vary their reading rates for different types of reading materials, nor does it provide test questions which adequately simulate college reading assignments.

In contrast, the addition of writing samples to the writing assessment is invariably identified as an important step in increasing validity. Similarly, the adoption of assessment batteries specifically designed for community colleges, such as the ASSET test or the Assessment and Placement Services for Community Colleges, is seen as an improvement in assessment practices.

Many task forces criticize the degree to which assessment and placement policies are adhered to, citing the large numbers of students who are not assessed in reading, writing, and mathematics and the high proportion of students diagnosed as needing remedial course work who never enroll in appropriate courses. The committees criticize the lack of emphasis many advisors place on remediation when they help students plan educational programs.

The following recommendations regarding assessment and placement were made by a substantial number of task forces (at least one-third):

Recommendations

1. More valid assessment instruments should be developed based on a clear identification of the basic skills needed by students to successfully complete community college course work.

2. Assessment procedures should be established which ensure that all new students are assessed. This procedure should be part of a comprehensive orientation and advisement program.

3. Placement in remedial courses should be mandatory when a valid assessment process identifies students as unprepared for college-level course work.

Many recommend mandatory placement as the only way to ensure students get the preparation they need. Some suggest that students should not be allowed to enroll in other course work until remedial requirements have been met. A number of colleges advise that if exceptions are to be made to mandatory placement they should be strictly controlled through a waiver system.

Some task forces, however, are cautious about recommending mandatory placement. They would support the idea only if assessment instruments are really valid and only if there is strong evidence that remedial programs are effective in preparing students for their college course work. Several schools point out the probable consequences of mandatory placement. They question whether colleges are prepared for a decline, at least temporarily, in their enrollments in regular courses and a sudden increase in the need for remedial instruction.

Remedial Programs

Most task forces comment positively about the remedial courses themselves, especially praising the instructors' dedication and skill in working with remedial students. They generally speak favorably about the instructional programs and teaching materials as well as the diagnostic, self-paced nature of the courses. The availability of support services such as skill labs and tutorial programs is identified as a positive factor. Committees also speak favorably of the number and sequencing of course offerings, especially in mathematics.

Negative comments center around the need for smaller class sizes and more adequate facilities. Committees also criticize the degree to which the programs serve specific groups of students. Students for whom English is a second language may be enrolled in courses for native speakers or may be instructed in separate ESL programs not well coordinated with the reading, writing, and mathematics programs. In addition, learning disabled students may be enrolled in courses which do not meet their needs since colleges may not have the capacity to diagnose learning disabilities. Some task forces feel the existing programs do not serve the lowest skill levels well, while others feel that the marginally proficient students are not served well because of a program focus on those with the greatest need.

Recommendations

1. Class sizes should be reduced to allow for more adequate instruction. Student/teacher ratios should be smaller than average in remedial courses.

2. Adequate facilities should be made available so that all students can take full advantage of support services.

3. Special subgroups of students should be identified because they may have special needs. Programs which attempt to serve students with diverse needs in the same courses are not effective. Special categories of students could be better served if the colleges institute more comprehensive diagnostic procedures to identify learning disabled students and if they establish closer relationships with off-campus programs who serve adults with learning needs.

Course Outcomes and Program Evaluation

Although many committees speak favorably of the quality of instruction in the remedial courses, they are uniformly critical of the lack of solid documentation of course success. Many feel that even if you know a student has completed a remedial course you still cannot be certain of his skill level. Others complain that the colleges do not have good evidence that participation in remedial programs actually benefits students in further course work.

Recommendations

1. Colleges should establish clear exit criteria to be met by remedial students before they can successfully complete remedial programs. The remedial courses should be structured to prepare students to meet these criteria.

2. The exit criteria should be based on a needs assessment conducted to gain a valid understanding of the basic skill requirements of the college curriculum.

3. Comprehensive follow-up procedures should be instituted so the colleges can document the progress of students assessed as needing remediation. The student should be tracked so they complete remedial programs, enroll in subsequent course work and eventually graduate, transfer, or decide to leave the college. Such a follow-up effort will require the use of a computerized tracking system. Such a tracking system would also allow colleges to provide the ongoing advisement that promotes retention and achievement.

External Relationships

The college task forces are critical of how well the remedial programs relate to each other, especially with regard to mathematics programs which tend on most campuses to be separate from either reading or writing. Even when the programs are housed together administratively, there are criticisms of how well they are coordinated.

Comments are mixed about the relationships between remedial programs and college-level programs. On some campuses there seems to be ongoing interaction between remedial instructors and other members of the faculty. In some cases the same faculty may teach in both types of programs. On other campuses the remedial faculty appear to be isolated and they may feel that they are relegated to "second-class" status. Apparently there is considerable variation from campus to campus in terms of the degree of support the remedial programs receive from the colleges.

A number of specific recommendations for improvement in external relations are offered by the task forces:

Recommendations

1. Collegewide staff development activities should help all members of the college faculty and staff understand the purpose and nature of the remedial programs and increase the level of support for such programs.

2. Suggestions to improve relationships with the rest of the faculty include team-teaching arrangements between skills teachers and content teachers and training for all teachers in techniques to integrate the teaching of basic skills within the content areas. The best known of the integrative schemes mentioned in the reports is probably "writing across the curriculum" by which the

teaching of writing skill becomes a part of all teaching.

3. It was even suggested that the colleges play a proactive role in addressing the problem of underprepared students by working with high schools and adult education programs to develop preparatory programs.

Remedial Education and Institutional Goals

Although the task forces are critical of the policies and practices governing remedial education on their campuses, most assert that educational services for the underprepared are an essential part of the curriculum. The mission statements of many colleges specifically refer to the need for remedial education and link it to a number of other institutional goals. Without remedial education, a college cannot maintain quality in its transfer programs while at the same time continuing to provide open access. Remedial education is also necessary if the college is to provide effective job training and help to raise the educational level of the nation's work force. The task forces reiterated the connection between remedial education and the colleges' mission to serve the educational needs of all students.

SUMMARY

The study of remedial programs in the Texas Community Colleges conducted by the Texas Association of Junior and Community College Instructional Administrators reveals the growing importance of remediation and the recent expansion of course offerings. Most colleges are seriously concerned about the issues surrounding the presence of unprepared students on their campuses and are taking steps to address the problem, investing their human and nonhuman resources to meet this challenge. Many dedicated people are committed to serving the needs of these unprepared students, and many students are being helped to prepare for productive college careers.

However, the efforts across the state are uneven, and there is little coordination among campuses. On the average, one-half or more of the students enrolling in the colleges are not being assessed in basic skills, and a large percentage of those diagnosed as needing remediation are not enrolling in appropriate courses. In addition, most colleges are unable to document in a systematic way what happens to students who do enroll in the remedial courses.

Recommendations made by college task forces center around three interrelated issues: (1) The need to make certain all students needing remediation receive it; (2) the need for valid placement and exit criteria; and (3) the need for comprehensive tracking of students.

While many colleges favor mandatory assessment and placement in reading, writing, and mathematics, they would be hesitant to implement such a policy unless they are confident that the assessment procedures are valid. Tests should involve the basic skill demands actually made on students in their course work. Few schools have carried out the type of detailed study necessary to establish valid assessment criteria, and those that may have done so at one time usually do not have the means to continually update the criteria as program offerings grow and change.

In addition, many institutions are wary of mandatory placement when solid documentation of the value of remediation is lacking. Few programs can present evidence that students participating in remedial programs are helped to succeed. Where follow-up studies exist, they have generally been short-term investigations that do not provide the comprehensive student tracking necessary to establish course outcomes.

In summary, the study of remedial programs in Texas community colleges emphasizes the need to continue to address the problem of underprepared students by establishing valid procedures for assessment, placement, and program evaluation. The findings of this descriptive study can be used as the basis for beginning to develop policy in these interrelated areas.

APPENDIX A

SELF-STUDY GUIDE FOR THE STUDY OF REMEDIAL EDUCATION

REMEDIAL SELF-STUDY

QUESTION 1 SHOULD BE ANSWERED BY INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH STAFF

1. How many new students do you admit each fall:

   Full-time:_____, percent minority _____

   Part-time:_____, percent minority _____

   What percent of your degree credit students receive financial aid? _____

   If there are additional descriptions of your student body that are important to the purpose of this study, please include:

QUESTIONS 2 THROUGH 4 SHOULD BE ANSWERED BY THE REMEDIAL READING STAFF

2. Describe your procedures for assessing competencies in reading for new students. For Fall, 1986, indicate when and how assessment occurred, and the indicators used (e.g. name of test and cut-off score, high school rank, etc.).

   a. What procedures were used to establish the criteria that determined a student's need for remediation in reading? Who was involved in determining these criteria? Are you satisfied with the criteria?

   b. How many new students were assessed for reading competencies for Fall, 1986? _____. Of these, how many were diagnosed as requiring remediation in reading? _____. Of those diagnosed as needing remediation, how many enrolled in remedial reading class? _____.

   c. If the number of new students who enrolled in a remedial reading class were fewer than the number assessed as needing remediation, describe the process through which those not enrolling were excluded.

   d. If the number of students you reported assessing in 2b were fewer than the number of new students reported in Question 1, please indicate the criteria used to exclude new students from assessment in reading.

3. Describe your program for students who require remediation in reading. Indicate the number of courses offered and the objectives, content and methodology of each course.

   a. Describe any support services you provide to students undergoing remediation in reading (e.g. learning labs, tutoring, study skills sessions, etc.).

   b. What criteria (e.g. instructor grade, test score, etc.) do you use to determine when a student has been remediated in reading?

      If you use a test score, please provide the name of the test and cut-off score.

   c. Can remedial reading courses be used to meet the requirements for any degree or certificate (of one year or greater length) offered by your college?
      Yes _____, No _____. If your answer was yes, please indicate which degrees or certificates and under

what circumstances.

d. Does your college have a policy limiting the number of times a student may repeat a remedial reading course? Yes _____, No _____. If yes, please attach a copy.

e. Describe how your remedial reading program is organized. Is it a separate department or part of a larger unit? What is the job title of the program administrator? Where does he/she report within the college administrative structure? What formal or informalities exist between remedial reading staff and staff having responsibilities for remediation in writing and math?

4. Please report any outcome data you have for students who enroll in your remedial reading program (e.g. gains in scores on tests, attitudes toward the program, subsequent performance in regular college courses, degree or certificate completion, completion of some number of regular courses with a minimum specified GPA, etc.). For each outcome, please report the source (e.g. follow-up study, routine or special management report, faculty records, etc.).

QUESTIONS 5 THROUGH 7 SHOULD BE ANSWERED BY YOUR REMEDIAL WRITING STAFF

5. Describe your procedures for assessing competencies in writing for new students. For Fall, 1986, indicate when and how assessment occurred, and the indicators used for course placement (e.g. test and cut-off score, writing sample, high school rank, etc.).

a. What procedures were used to establish criteria that determined a student's need for remediation in writing? Are you satisfied with the criteria?

b. How many new students were assessed for writing competencies for Fall, 1986? _____. Of these, how many were diagnosed as requiring remediation in writing? _____. Of those diagnosed as needing remediation, how many enrolled in a remedial writing class? _____.

c. If the number of students who enrolled in a remedial writing class were fewer than the number assessed as needing remediation, describe the process through which

those not enrolling were excluded.

d. If the number of students you reported assessing in 5b were fewer than the number of new students reported in Question 1, please indicate the criteria used to exclude new students from assessment in writing.

6. Describe your program for students who require remediation in writing. Indicate the number of courses offered and the objectives, content and methodology of each course.

a. Describe any support services you provide to students undergoing remediation in writing (e.g. learning labs, tutoring, study skills sessions, etc.)

b. What criteria (e.g. instructor grades, test score, writing sample, etc.) do you use to determine when a student has been remediated in writing?

If you use test score, please provide the name of the test and the cut-off score.

c. Can remedial writing courses be used to meet the requirements for any degree or certificate (of one year or greater in length) offered by your college?
Yes _____, No _____. If your answer was yes, please indicate which degree or certificate and under what circumstances.

d. Does your college have a policy limiting the number of times a student may repeat a remedial writing course?
Yes _____, No _____. If yes, please attach a copy.

e. Describe how your remedial writing program is organized. Is it a separate department or part of a larger unit? What is the job title of the responsible administrator? Where does he/she report with the college administrative structure? What formal or informalities exist between the remedial writing staff and staff having responsibilities for remediation in reading and mathematics.

7. Please report any outcome data you have for students who enroll in your remedial writing program (e.g. gains on test scores, improvement in writing sample, attitudes toward the program, performance in subsequent courses in the English sequence, degree or certificate completion; etc.). For each outcome please report the source (e.g. follow-up study, routine or special management report, faculty records, etc.)

QUESTIONS 8 THROUGH 10 SHOULD BE ANSWERED BY YOUR REMEDIAL MATHEMATICS STAFF

8. Describe your procedures for assessing competencies in math for new students. For Fall, 1986, indicate when and how assessment occurred, and the indicators used (e.g. name of test and cut-off score, high school courses completed, etc.).

   If you used a test constructed at your college please indicate the level of high school math below which a student would be defined as remedial for purposes of your college parallel associate degree programs.

   a. What procedures were used to establish the criteria that determined a student's need for remediation in math? Who was involved in determining these criteria? Are you satisfied with the criteria?

   b. How many new students were assessed for math competencies for Fall, 1986? _____. Of these, how many were diagnosed as needing remediation in math? _____. Of those diagnosed as needing remediation, how many enrolled in a remedial math course? _____.

   c. If the number of new students who enrolled in a remedial course were fewer than the number assessed as needing remediation, describe the process through which those not enrolling were excluded.

   d. If the number of students you reported assessing in 8b were fewer than the number of new students reported in Question 1, please indicate the criteria used to exclude students from assessment in math.

9. Describe your program for students who require remediation in math. Indicate the number of courses offered and the objectives, content and methodology of each course.

   a. Describe any support services you provide to students undergoing remediation in math (e.g. learning labs, tutoring, study skills sessions, etc.).

   b. What criteria (e.g. instructor grade, test score, etc.) do you use to determine when a student has been remediated in math?

   c. Can remedial courses in mathematics be used to meet the requirements for any degree or certificate (of one year

or longer in length) offered by your college? Yes _____, No _____. If your answer was yes, please indicate which degrees or certificates and under what circumstances.

d. Does your college have a math competency requirement that must be met by all students graduating with an associate degree? Yes _____, No _____. If yes, please describe the competency requirement and indicate the alternatives through which it can be met. If no, please describe the degrees that can be earned without demonstrating a math competency.

e. Does your college have a policy limiting the number of times a student may repeat a remedial math course? Yes _____, No _____. If yes, please attach a copy.

f. Describe how your remedial math program is organized. Is it part of the math department or a separate operation? What is the job title of the program administrator? Where does he/she report within the college administrative structure? What formal or informal ties exist between the remedial math staff and staff having responsibilities for remediation in reading and writing?

10. Please report any outcome data you have for students who enroll in your remedial math program (e.g. gains in scores on tests, attitudes toward the program, subsequent performance in advanced math courses, degree or certificate completion in math related fields, etc.). For each outcome, please report the source (e.g. follow-up study, routine or special management report, faculty records, etc.).

<u>QUESTIONS 11 THROUGH 14 SHOULD BE ANSWERED BY YOUR TASK FORCE ON THE ASSESSMENT OF COMPENSATORY EDUCATION AFTER REVIEWING THE DATA PROVIDED BY THE ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS 1 THROUGH 10</u>

11. Institutional goals are statements about the major priorities a college pursues at a given time to achieve its mission under a particular set of environmental constraints. Colleges that have been engaged in strategic planning may have an explicit listing of goals but all colleges have at least an implicit set of priorities on which they act. <u>Please provide a copy of your mission statement and identify as well as you are able those goals your compensatory education program is designed to achieve in relation to that mission.</u>

12. As you review the information on your compensatory programs in relation to your institutional goals, what strengths and weaknesses can you identify?

    a. Reading:

       Strengths:

       Weaknesses:

    b. Writing:

       Strengths:

       Weaknesses:

    c. Mathematics:

       Strengths:

       Weaknesses:

13. Please describe briefly any recommendations you have for improving compensatory education at your institution.

    a. Reading:

    b. Writing:

    c. Mathematics:

    d. Other:

APPENDIX B

TEXAS COMMUNITY COLLEGES, JUNIOR COLLEGES AND TECHNICAL INSTITUTES PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY OF REMEDIAL EDUCATION

Alvin Community College
Amarillo College
Angelina College
Austin Community College
Bee County College
Blinn College
Brazosport College
Brookhaven Community College
Cedar Valley College
Central Texas College
Cisco Junior College
Clarendon College
College of the Mainland
Collin County Community College
Cooke County College
Eastfield College
El Centro College
El Paso Community College
Frank Phillips College
Galveston College
Grayson County College
Hill College
Houston Community College
Howard College
Kilgore College
Laredo Junior College
Lee College
Midland College
McLennan Community College
Mountain View College
Navarro College
North Lake College
North Harris County College
Northeast Texas Community College
Palo Alto College
Panola Junior College
Paris Junior College
Ranger Junior College
Richland College
St. Philip's College
San Antonio College
San Jacinto College Central
San Jacinto College North
San Jacinto College South
South Plains College
Southwest Texas Junior College
Tarrant County Junior College Northwest
Tarrant County Junior College South
Temple Junior College
Texas Southmost College
Texas State Technical Institute - Amarillo
Texas State Technical Institute - Harlingen
Texas State Technical Institute - Sweetwater
Texas State Technical Institute - Waco
Texarkana Community College
Trinity Valley Community College
Tyler Junior College
Vernon Regional Junior College
The Victoria College
Weatherford College
Western Texas College
Wharton County Junior College

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